



August 9, 2006

Judy Jeffrey, Director

TO: All Superintendents and High School Principals

RE: Marketing and Public Relations Materials

You all are aware that Iowa has been working on high school improvement initiatives for the past five years, with many districts making especially strong efforts over the past several years. Despite the many calls for parents to raise their expectations and students to work harder, these messages too often are not being heard or heeded. Students in particular do not relate to a "need to be globally competitive" message, or to explicit commands for them to embrace challenging math or science courses.

We need to communicate more effective messages to these audiences if we are to succeed in getting parents and students to understand, support and participate in our high school improvement efforts. To assist in that communication process, the Iowa Department of Education is pleased to provide you this first installment of a marketing and public relations toolkit that will help you reach out to key audiences about your efforts toward high school improvement.

Materials in this toolkit are designed to support the high school improvement initiatives you are implementing and plan to continue — including increased graduation requirements; increased rigor in coursework; better relationships between school staff, students and community; and better planning tools to help students prepare for success beyond high school.

Our primary target audience for these materials is unmotivated and underachieving students and their parents. The secondary audience is members of the community, with a focus on businesses. Our goals for the marketing and public relations materials are based on research we have reviewed or conducted over the past 18 months. With consistent implementation, these communications should help:

- Change perception among students and parents about what skills are needed to prepare students for work and life.
- Motivate students to be more purposeful and improve their course-taking to prepare them for work and life.
- Build community support and partnerships to support high school and student improvement efforts.



Background/Assumptions

Research from secondary sources and primary focus groups shows:

Students:

- Need a better understanding of the increased skills needed for work/college/life.
- Believe they are not smart enough to take advanced or challenging courses.
- Do not understand how courses relate to future work/college/life.
- Cannot identify their own skills/talents and how they relate to potential careers.
- Are primarily influenced by peers and teachers.
- Know and appreciate when they are held to high expectations.
- Feel they have little voice or influence over their own education.
- Hear the emphasis on strong math and science, but do not relate to it or are demotivated by it.
- Need hope, confidence and planning for their futures.

Parents:

- Do not have a clear understanding that skills needed for work/college/life have increased.
- Do not know how to help their kids plan for their futures.
- Need tools and support to raise expectations and keep them high.

Community groups and business:

- Believe graduates are not properly prepared for work/college/life.
- Want graduates to have a wide range of skills, including 21st century skills such as communication, critical thinking and teamwork skills.
- Are eager to help schools and students.
- Do not know how to partner with schools.
- Need tools and templates to guide them.

Key Marketing and Public Relations Components

The DE will provide you marketing and public relations materials throughout the 2006-07 school year to help you work with your local board and other education leaders to communicate key messages to key audiences. Materials will include:

- ➔ A "branding logo" to help build awareness among students and parents about the need to take strong coursework and actively plan for the future.



- ➔ Key messages for inclusion in your district newsletters or community newspapers that will build on each other throughout the year:
 - Dream It (raise your expectations)
 - Plan It (use your planning tools)
 - Learn It (focus on coursework)
 - Do It (stay the course)
- ➔ A toolkit for building principals to help them communicate key messages to students, parents, staff and community members.
- ➔ Projects for students to participate in throughout the year to help build their interest and confidence, and motivate them to take charge of their own education.
- ➔ Tools to help build partnerships with local businesses.

These materials will be designed for local districts to customize the contents or information to meet their local needs. If you need adjustments to any materials, or have suggestions for additional materials that would be helpful to your communication efforts, please contact Kathi Slaughter at kathi.slaughter@iowa.gov or 515-281-5651.